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ABSTRACT

Students entering high school as freshmen bring with them a variety of issues, problems and strengths. Often, students are uncertain about their academic abilities, their social-selves, and their chances of success in a new environment. Even freshmen with positive educational experiences and a strong sense of self-need support and guidance during this transitional year. The key element in advisement programs is the importance of personalizing the school environment for students as well as teachers. The activities in Sections 2 and 3 of this handbook, which would be conducted within the 23-minute daily homeroom period, are designed to promote involvement and communication among group members. Section 2 involves "Get Acquainted Activities" and suggests exercises such as name games and partner introductions. Section 3, "Involvement Activities," seeks the creation of deeper trust and openness among group members by encouraging more personal revelations. Students discuss and share their feelings on matters about their lives and their families. Section 4, "Learning by Real Problems," (LBRP) offers students an opportunity to become empowered by allowing them to attempt to create solutions to a real problem that is actual and immediate within a particular classroom, school, community or society. Section 5, "Encouraging Students," offers suggestions to education professionals on how to motivate and encourage students. Contains 24 references. (BF)

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PEMBROKE ACADEMY

FRESHMAN ADVISOR HANDBOOK

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PEMBROKE ACADEMY FRESHMAN ADVISOR HANDBOOK

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PEMBROKE ACADEMY FRESHMAN ADVISOR HANDBOOK

SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

Students entering high school as freshmen bring with them a variety of issues, problems and strengths. Often, many of these students are uncertain about their academic abilities, their social-selves, and their chance of success in a new and unfamiliar environment. Previous academic and social experiences impact students' desire & motivation to succeed. Freshmen are also affected by peer pressure, fears of rejection and isolation, and new school policies and procedures. Even freshmen with positive educational experiences, good organizational and social skills, and a strong sense of self need support and guidance during this transitional and, often, crucial year.

To address these and other needs of growing adolescents, a number of high schools have designed and implemented advisement programs to assist students with adjustment issues in a new school; to help students understand appropriate behavior and social expectations; and to promote responsible and respectful attitudes and behaviors among students (Kronholm, Jespersen, and Fjell, 1987). Graham and Hawkins (1984) suggested that advisement programs generally aim to improve student-teacher relationships; improve school climate; and provide an additional means of delivering guidance-related services such as academic and vocational planning, decision-making, and self-assessment. An additional goal of many advisory programs involves providing support for the social and emotional development of students through individual and small group discussions on such topics as confidence, leadership, and school, family, health, peer, and ethical issues (Mac Iver, 1990). Lastly, some advisory programs have successfully retained potential drop-outs (Mac Iver, 1990).

In a nationwide research project conducted to assess the effectiveness of advisement programs in achieving these, and other goals, Putbrese (1989) concluded that advisory programs:

1. improve teacher-student relationships;
2. give students more control over decisions;
3. promote an atmosphere of equality;
4. provide opportunities for group work;
5. improve sharing of feeling between students;
6. help maximize altruistic nature of adolescents;
7. reduce incidence of smoking and alcohol abuse; and
8. make teachers more aware of and more attentive to student behavior.

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Role of the Advisor

A successful advisement program "involves role changes for teachers, counselors, and principals" (Graham and Hawkins, 1984, p. 83). The teacher's role as an advisor, as defined by Shockley, Schumacher, and Smith (1984), is to:

* establish a caring relationship with individual advisees;
* provide availability to students to discuss concerns and interests;
* confer with students and parents (communication link between school, home, and community);
* assist students in obtaining information about school activities;
* serve as the first line source of referral (to nurse, counselors, other specialists);
* serve as academic expert and student advocate for each advisee;
* provide social and emotional education for advisees;
* act as a sounding board (assist students in working out problems); and
* conduct group guidance activities (pp. 73-74).

Nattermann (1988) stated that advisors "are not expected to personally supply all information about the school and its services and to take the place of guidance counselors. They are contact persons who can help direct students to those who can provide answers" (p. 121). In Nattermann's view, the responsibilities of advisors include:

1. assisting students with planning a course schedule;
2. collecting and recording basic academic information about each student;
3. completing career education activities with students;
3. communicating with other teachers about student progress; and
5. assisting advisees in recognizing their own potential, building a positive self-image, and setting personal short and long-range goals (pp. 121-122).

Keefe (1986) provided more specific tasks when suggesting that advisors could serve as someone students could talk to about:

1. grades and credits;
2. the use of time;
3. study techniques;
4. educational and vocational plans;
5. life in and out of school;
6. attendance and discipline;
7. problems with other students & teachers;
8. withdrawal from school.

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Summary

The one element that seems to pervade the literature on advisement programs is the importance of personalizing the school environment for students as well as teachers. "Personalization is the key to making schools exciting and productive places of learning" (Keefe, 1986, p. 85). Phelan, Davidson, and Cao (1992) found that students value teachers who care; who make attempts to "connect" with them; who are considerate; who encourage participation; and who involve themselves in students' lives. "Each student needs the continuing and caring advice that only an experienced teacher can give - someone who has already walked the same road" (Keefe, 1986, p. 90).

Advisory Program at Pembroke Academy

During the 1993-94 school year, the Freshman Team discussed a variety of issues affecting freshmen. One of the suggestions involved the implementation of an advisory program for the 1994-95 school year. Meetings were subsequently held with interested faculty to elicit input and concerns and to discuss the feasibility of initiating an advisory program. A brief "orientation" session was held just prior to summer vacation. Lastly, a sub-group of the Freshman Team submitted a "R & D" proposal to develop this document.

This Advisor Handbook should be viewed as a "working document" rather than a final product. It is the intention of the Freshman Team to view the implementation of the advisory program as a "process" that requires continuing input, discussion, and refinement. Your willingness to serve as an advisor and your participation in the development of the advisory program ARE definitely appreciated!

Suggestions and Recommendations

The activities in Sections 2 and 3 of this handbook are designed to promote involvement and communication among group members. As such, they can be considered "stand alone" activities - conducted within the 23 minute daily homeroom period. For the first few months, one homeroom period a week can be set aside for an involvement activity. School business and needs for study time should also be considered when planning. Advisors should also get to know each of their students on an individual, personal level by informally circulating about the room and by conducting private interviews on a monthly basis. Should students express concerns or problems beyond the scope of your training, refer these students to the appropriate specialists in the school.

SECTION 2: GET ACQUAINTED ACTIVITIES

The exercises described below are intended to be used during the first month of the school year to help you and your advisees get to know each other and to develop trust and openness. The activities that follow go from low to higher levels of trust needed to participate. However, it is always reasonable to allow students to "pass" on any exercise they choose not to participate in. The time listed for each exercise is meant to be a general guide for your planning. These exercises need not be done with the entire group. You can certainly use whatever group size you feel will best meet your time limits. When the entire group is involved, it is best to have students rearrange desks so that everyone is sitting in a circle.

1. Name Game (15 sec. per participant)

Students get into a circle (sitting or standing). One student begins by stating his/her name. The next person to the right repeats the first person's name, then states her own. The third person repeats both previous names before stating his own, and so on until the last person repeats everyone's name prior to stating her name. (Variation: Each person states own name and something else about themselves ie: favorite ice cream flavor, sports car, TV show, etc).

2. Partner Introductions (3-6 minutes for interviews; 30 sec./student for introduction)

- Interviews: Students partner-up with another student they do not know. Partners decide who will be "A" and who will be "B." For two-three minutes, Partner "A" interviews "B." When time is called, "B" interviews "A." Interview questions may be brainstormed by the group prior to the activity or partners can ask whatever they are interested in. Note-taking can be encouraged.

- Introductions: After each partner has had a chance to be interviewed, one pair of partners at a time stands up and each person introduces their partner, saying a few things they learned about that person during the interview.

3. Shoe Leather (5 sec/student)

Say "I would walk a mile for/to _____." (Fill in with appropriate items such as "a bowl of clam chowder," "to see my girlfriend," etc.) Have each student state what they would walk a mile for.

4. The Eyewitness (10 seconds per student)

Say "You have just invented a time machine which can take you to any event, large or small, which has ever occurred." For example, you could become a witness to Lincoln's Gettysburg Address or the moment your father proposed to your mother. After giving a few seconds to think of an event, ask each student "What event would you select to become an eyewitness?"

(**NOTE**: Throughout these exercises, encourage students to "mix and mingle," so that the same partners are not always sitting together or next to each other.)

4. More Power to You (3-5 min. to make lists; 30 sec/student to share)

Instruct the class to make a list of as many items as possible that use electricity (lists may be done individually or brainstormed as an entire group). When the list has been completed, each student is to select two items without which their lives would be considerably more miserable and two items which they feel they would not greatly miss. Have the class share the results.

5. The Guardian (5-7 minutes)

Have the class pair-off. Each partner selects an item from their wallet, purse, or pocket that has special meaning. Partners share the item and the meaning with each other.

6. I Hope (1 minute per student)

Begin with an "I Hope...." such as "I hope that we all get to know and like each other very much during this coming year." Ask the class to think up individual "I Hopes" and then allow them to share.

7. What's in a Name (3-5 minutes)

Have students sit in groups of three. Write the following open-ended questions on the board, then ask students to share their answers with their other group members.

-"My full name is ...."
-"But people usually call me ...."
-"When I was young, my nickname was ...."
-"I liked (or disliked) the name because ...."
-"The name I prefer to be called now is ...."
-"If I could change my name, I would change it to ...."

8. What I Want/What I Want to Avoid (5-7 minutes)

Students arrange desks to form a circle. Instruct students to think of one success they want to achieve this school year and one event/experience they want to avoid. Allow 1-2 minutes for thought, then go around the circle sharing.

9. Success Involvement Activity (15-20 minutes)

Each student shares with the group responses to the following statements:

-something you especially like to do
-a happy experience you had
-a decision you've made that has affected your life
-an experience when you've been successful
(option: may be done in small groups of 2-4 students)

SECTION 3: INVOLVEMENT ACTIVITIES

Involvement activities are similar to the "get acquainted" activities in Part 2 and generally can be conducted the same ways, in small or large groups, with consideration given for time limits of the Advisory period. Involvement activities seek the creation of deeper trust and openness among group members by encouraging more personal revelations.

Suggestion: use occasionally, say once a week, to maintain or build full-group communications.

1. Three Symbols (20-25 minutes)

Name 3 symbols in your life (1) as it was, (2) as it is now, and (3) as you want it to be. Leader goes first but also must give an example before going. Explain why you picked each symbol. (EXAMPLE: "I used to be a slow, wandering creek, without any force & no direction. Now, I'm a bubbly brook. I want to be a strong river, with purpose and direction, but calm underneath, with no tricky currents.")

2. Polarity Game (variable: 5-15 minutes)

Have everyone stand on a line (real or imaginary) in the center of the room (area = 8' wide). Call out pairs of objects you've made up in advance. Students must choose to go to one side of the room/area or the other (cannot be indecisive & stand in the center). Examples:

Like chocolate	Like Vanilla
New Hampshire natives	Outsiders
Sports-players	Sports-watchers
Like math	Hate math
Talker	Listener
etc.....	

Suggestion: -begin with superficial then to more meaningful.
-have students make some up, also.

3. New and Good (5 minutes)

Ask: "Tell us something new and good that has happened to you this week."

suggestion: change "this week" to "over vacation," "over the weekend," etc.

4. Birth Position in Family (10-15 minutes)

Break into groups of "1st child," "2nd," "middle child," "youngest child," "only child." Each group then discusses the good, bad, pluses, minuses, or whatever they want to share about being in their birth position.

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5. I used to be but now I am (10-15 minutes)

To get students thinking about how they have changed, ask them to write, then share, one or two "fill-in's" using this phrase: "I used to be _____, but now I am _____."

for example: "I used to be shy but now I am friendly"
"I used to be weak but now I am strong"

6. One Liners (5 minutes, each)

Use one of these "one-liners" (or make up your own) as an opener to your advisory meeting:

a. tell the group one thing you feel good about today
b. choose 3 words ending in "ing" that describe you as a person
c. tell the group three things you love to do
d. tell us two things you are really good at doing
e. tell us one thing you are proud of
f. what is one thing you would do differently if you could start today all over again?
g. what is one thing you want to learn to do?
h. what are some questions you've been wondering about?
i. how would your life be different if you won Megabucks?
j. what is a social issue you feel strongly about?
k. what is one thing you want to accomplish this year?
l. where is your favorite spot when you want to be by yourself?
m. what is the best thing that's happened to you today?
n. what is the worst " " " " " "
o. what is your most prized possession?
p. talk about your best friend and what you like about him or her
q. if you could live anywhere in the world, where would you live?
r. my main concern about being at P.A. is _____.
s. something I did that taught me a lesson
t. something I want to get better at
u. a tough decision I've made
v. how I avoid trouble
w. something I plan to do as a parent
x. how I rebel against authority
y. a time when I was put-down & it really hurt

use the space below and on the other side to write "one-liners" you come up with.

suggestion: on slips of paper, ask your students to write "one-liners" and use them with the whole group.

7. Letter to Yourself (20-25 minutes, or longer)
* materials: paper
envelopes

(Initially, this is an individual activity, not to be shared with others. Use this activity after you've achieved a level of seriousness about these activities with your group.)

On a sheet of paper, each student is asked to write a "letter to themselves." When you introduce this activity, say that in the letter, students may want to write about a goal they have set, a personal concern they are dealing with, a dream/wish they have, or anything personal they want to write about. At a future date (usually 4-6 months away), the letters will be "delivered" and students will then be able to read about their lives as it was when the letters were written. When students have finished writing, they are to put their letter in an envelope, seal it, address it to themselves (name only) and give it to you for safe-keeping.

Then, at some future point, say just before school ends in June, distribute the letters so the students can read their thoughts from several months earlier. At this time, it may be appropriate for students to share with each other.

8. Gift Giving (two full advisory periods)

(This activity requires trust, seriousness, and honesty among group members since the activity involves giving feedback and showing appreciation to group members.)

Students will need one small piece of paper for each group member and a pencil. Introduce the activity by saying:

"It is often possible to enjoy small gifts more than large ones. Yet, we sometimes become so concerned about not being able to do great things for each other that we neglect to do even the littlest things that can be very meaningful. In the following experience, we will all be giving a small gift to each person in this group."

Ask students to write on a slip of paper a message to each other group member. The messages are intended to make that person feel positive about him/herself.

Encourage students to sign their names, but give them the option of leaving them unsigned.

When message writing is finished, ask students to fold each message once and write the name of the recipient on the outside. Distribute the messages all at the same time.

When the messages have been delivered, invite students to share the feedback that was most meaningful for them, to clarify any ambiguous messages, and/or to express the feelings they experienced during the activity.

SECTION 4: LEARNING BY REAL PROBLEMS (LBRP)

Learning-By-Real-Problems "offers students a unique opportunity to become empowered, to take action on a real issue, to solve a real problem in need of a real solution, to collaborate at a high level, to invest in learning, to experience self-direction, to develop knowledge, and to use and value Critical Skills....An LBRP is a real problem that is actual and immediate within a particular classroom, school, community or society, and that is in need of a viable solution" (A Guide Through The Critical Skills Classroom-LBRP, 1991, p. 1).

There are eight steps of an LBRP:

1. Present the problem to the students (or redirect a problem students have been telling you about);
2. step back and let the students go;
3. set up an interim panel to review the students' work;
4. have the students resume work;
5. set up a formal jury to review the students' final solution;
6. debrief students on both the presentation and the entire experience;
7. share your evaluation of the product and the process of the LBRP; and
8. have the students follow-through on their solution.

Suggestion: The more the problems come from students' experience, the more invested they will be in finding solutions.

Suggestion: work on one LBRP's at a time and do not expect to work on more than 3 LBRP's per school year.

.....

The following LBRP's are presented as examples of what can be done by small groups of students working together to solve real problems.

Write/Publish...
issue: School and Community
Problem: New students need to know what to expect in school
LBRP: Create a procedure and a means to convey what is required for students to make the transition from 8th grade to 9th grade in this district, to be distributed to all 8th graders before the end of this school year.

Multimedia Presentation...
Issue: Community
Problem: New students often feel afraid when they first come to school.
LBRP: Create a 10-15 minute video that welcomes new students to school and introduces the people, places, and activities of the school...that will be used in new student orientation programs.

Develop a presentation for...
Issue: Community
Problem: theft from lockers
LBRP: Create a 5-10 minute presentation that you will perform in other advisory groups depicting the problem of locker theft and offering students practical ways of preventing theft.

Write/publish...
Issue: School as a community
Problem: students need a voice in the school
LBRP: create a way for freshmen to contribute articles to the school newspaper.

Create a Display...
Issue: Respect and Responsibility
Problem: name calling & put-downs are out of control
LBRP: design a bulletin board depicting how name calling and put-downs demoralize students and, then, show ways to communicate that show respect.

Write/Publish...
issue: academic success
problem: some students are afraid of using the Learning Center because they think the place is for "dummies"
LBRP: come up with several ways to take the stigma out of going to the Learning Center or come up with several ways to give positive "PR" to the Leaning Center.

Write/Publish...
Issue: academic success
Problem: poor study skills
LBRP: put together a study guide that will give students as many hints and suggestions for effective studying and test-taking as possible.

Write/Publish...
Issue: Community
Problem: there's nothing to do during summer vacation
LBRP: put together a resource guide listing and describing possible ways your classmates can use their time next summer.

Organize...
Issue: Community
Problem: there's nothing to do during summer vacation
LBRP: Organize several (freshman) class activities, either as one-time events (trip to beach) or as weekly get-togethers (softball games every Tues. evening).

Use the space below to write down ideas that you or your students come up with.

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SECTION 5: ENCOURAGING STUDENTS

(adapted from: Nelson, R.C. (1991). The counselor as reinforcer. The School Counselor, 39(3), 68-76.

It's always nice to hear someone mention something positive about us, to give us a compliment, a "thanks," or just a "pat on the back" for a job well done. In fact, these nurturing comments help us stay motivated and focused since they indicate that we're doing the kinds of things that others recognize and appreciate.

Well, students need to hear these things, as well. Believe it or not, and even if students don't show it, they value positive comments and encouragement from their teachers. "Reinforcers" have a way of both acknowledging the existence of a person and also providing feedback about specific behaviors and attitudes exhibited by that person.

The following "reinforcers" are offered as suggestions for use with your advisees:

1. Acknowledge students: say "hello," smile, give eye contact, brief verbal exchanges, address them by their first name.

2. Be demonstrative: offer a handshake or a "high five;" cite a specific comment you heard from another teacher about that student; comment about a specific, positive, behavior you've just observed.

3. Name a "student of the week:" yes, even in advisory groups, students of the week can be recognized.

4. Make telephone calls or send notes home to parents:

5. Promote involvement: encourage students to get involved in school activities.

6. Recognize birthdays: list each of your advisees' birthdays in your attendance book then announce it when it occurs. Some teachers hold a "mini"-birthday party once a month for all students having a birthday that month.

7. Teach students to reinforce themselves: negative self-talk is rampant...we're constantly putting ourselves down with negative descriptors. Instead, teach students to give themselves compliments when they've succeeded, to take a few seconds to feel the pride of accomplishment.

8. Write notes to students: some students may be too embarrassed to hear positive comments from teachers in front of their peers. Consider writing short notes specifically commenting on a positive you've observed.

9. Ask students their opinion: draw out their thoughts on contemporary issues, news items, sports event. Ask them for their solutions to school, community, national problems.

10. Turn deficits on their heads: what is often considered a deficit (a behavior or attitude that gets a student in trouble) can be turned around into a strength. For instance, to an argumentative student, you can say: "I admire the way you stand up for what you believe." Instead of engaging in a power struggle, choose to appreciate one of his/her strengths.

11. Avoid "Negating": "Negating" is a way of putting down someone else's view or feeling. For instance, saying something like: "you really have nothing to be afraid of" denies the existence of whatever it is that's prompting that fear. Instead, respond with a reflective statement like "you must really be struggling to keep that from happening."

12. Keep in Touch: Be aware of the students in your group who seek your attention and, conversely, the students who never talk to you. Extend yourself to the quiet students, to the students who seem resistant. Set a goal for yourself that you'll make contact with each student in your group at least once a week.

13. Challenge: Some students are bored with school (really?) Talk to them about it. Bet them an ice cream cone if they make "honorable mention." Be creative.

14. Maintain a relationship. You can expect a few students in your group to be totally turned-off by school and resistant to just about everything you try with them. Even if all else fails, continue to say "Hi," initiate a conversation, ask them a question, or try one of these "reinforcers." Remember: your efforts to reach out may be the only thing keeping this kid in school.

15. "CHILL" Keep your perspective. Reinforce yourself by using positive self-talk, recognize your efforts, especially with the at-risk students. Back off from a confrontation, listen. Don't try to do it all.

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